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THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

16 MAY, 1980

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The shadow of the known

By Rosemary Dinnage

ANTONY ALPERS:
The Life of Katherine Mansfield
466pp. Cape. £9.50.
0 224 01625 3

KATHERINE MANSFIELD:
The Urewera Notebook
107pp. Oxford University Press.
£7.75.
0 19 558033 3

This is a biography on the mighty twentieth-century scale. Readers of Antony Alpers' account of his complete rewriting of his biography of some thirty years ago (TLS, March 28) will know the story of how it came about. Several things have happened since his *Katherine Mansfield* of 1953. There are no longer any personal susceptibilities to be respected; a mass of documentation about Mansfield's generation of writers has landed in the academic vaults; and there are research grants that the waiting out of writing. Alpers' list of acknowledgments shows that during his nine years' labour on this second book he has left no literary stone unturned: it includes the living and the dead, officials and academics, New Zealanders and Americans and Europeans, friends, husbands and lovers of his subject, Bloomsbury's descendants and Bloomsbury itself. Alpers has done detective work in Germany unearthing a murky period in Mansfield's life followed in her footsteps to mountain health resorts, consulted eighteen great libraries. He has even had the assistance of Philip Larkin in discovering that on Guy Fawkes Night, in Hull, in 1908, something did not happen. (His sense of humour, essential for the job of grappling with Mansfield's tricky life, is so quiet it might be overlooked.)

There may be grumbles that all this biographical machinery is out of proportion to its subject, a girl poet, one answer is that Mansfield's talent was more promising than the work she had time to do; that if Virginia Woolf, for instance, had died at thirty-four she would only have written *The Voyage Out*. A more substantial point is that the biography has become a picture of the period as well as of Katherine Mansfield: what other writer,

Alpers asks, was involved with Orage's *New Age*; the Laurences; Virginia Woolf; the Garsington set; Middleton Murry's *Rhythm* and *Athenaeum*; and (briefly) with Eliot, Wyndham Lewis, Bertrand Russell? Biography, in any case, is not something to be weighed out in exact proportion to its subject's importance; the value can be in the writing of it, and a year of any Mrs Duggins's life could be enthralling if a person and time and place were really re-created.

Alpers does in fact re-live the life to the published work deliberately and successfully. But even if we only had letters and journals from Mansfield we would have a wonderfully interesting record of experience; particularly of the last five years of a life consciously struggling against illness and approaching death (the only other recorders of that experience I can think of are Barbellion and Alice James). Alpers has most industriously filled in the hitherto mysterious few years before she met Murry at twenty-four; but it is not clear to anyone but Mansfield devotees that it shows how well she could write already when undistracted by swooning fantasies. Professor Gordon, however, claims that the biographer's picture of a confused, self-tormenting adolescent needs reassessment; the diary shows that she energetically enjoyed her trip, he says, and what's more, while waiting for her passage she danced, swam, played tennis, went to the theatre. It is difficult to see what this proves. Since no one has suggested that she was a person unable to do great joy from travel and landscape and "normal" life. Professor Gordon seems not to have heard of ambivalence: Mansfield did love her home and her homeland; but as well as dancing, swimming, etc., she was writing "My mind is like a Russian novel," and "How people ever wish to live here I cannot think," and having an affair with a Maori girl.

She seems to have gone every sort of hog since she was 17. Virginia Woolf was half fascinated and half shocked by what Katherine told of her life: how much did she learn, even so, of the years between nineteen and twenty-four that Alpers has excavated? They include the passionate affairs with girls in New Zealand; a pregnancy scare on the voyage to England; reactions at parties to elze out her living; the unexplained marriage to George

—just eighteen years of age—with a rapacious appetite for everything and principles as light as my purse. It is, obviously, the self-description of the average self-infatuated schoolgirl (she was in fact the child of an influential and prosperous man); but about the predatory lack of principle she was pretty accurate. Virginia Woolf's first reaction—"an unpleasant but forcible and utterly unscrupulous character"—is in line with a good many other reactions to her quoted here. Coldly regarded as the worst as a child, she perhaps had only the choice between victim's role and victimizer's, and sometimes chose the latter—though she remarkably outgrew it.

At nineteen, while waiting for her longed-for passage to England and independence, she made a record of a month's trip through the New Zealand countryside; it has now been edited, with much paraphernalia, by Professor Ian A. Gordon of Wellington (*The Urewera Notebook*). It is not of great interest to anyone but Mansfield devotees, though it shows how well she could write already when undistracted by swooning fantasies. Professor Gordon, however, claims that the biographer's picture of a confused, self-tormenting adolescent needs reassessment; the diary shows that she energetically enjoyed her trip, he says, and what's more, while waiting for her passage she danced, swam, played tennis, went to the theatre. It is difficult to see what this proves. Since no one has suggested that she was a person unable to do great joy from travel and landscape and "normal" life. Professor Gordon seems not to have heard of ambivalence: Mansfield did love her home and her homeland; but as well as dancing, swimming, etc., she was writing "My mind is like a Russian novel," and "How people ever wish to live here I cannot think," and having an affair with a Maori girl.

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Bowden whom she left within a few hours; an "elopement" with the twin brother of her teenage idol, going on tour with the opera company he worked for; being packed off to Germany by her parents, losing his baby by a miscarriage. Afterwards there were several more lovers, one of whom later blackmailed her, possibly an abortion, and certainly an operation following venereal disease. For a young woman in the years 1907 to 1912, this was indeed "every sort of bad". Yet even Alpers has not been able to disguise what Katherine Mansfield felt about these experiences, how much she was hurt by them, how willingly she had not involved in them. There are some clues in the fiction—though it is curiously sexless. Yet in eighteen she had scribbled: "I alone and this silent clock-filled room have become powerfully—I want Mata—I want her as I have had her terribly. This is unclear I know but true."

The life-story after she met and began to live with Middleton Murry is much better known. There were just ten years of life left: five before the knowledge of her illness (though Alpers believes she had probably had it for years); five afterwards, until her death. Throughout these years she was writing determinedly though sporadically. *Prelude* being published by the Woolfs in 1918 and *Bliss* in 1920; but "The Garden Party" was not finished until fifteen months before her death, and it was towards the end that her writing had started to gutter, momentum. A certain amount of time she also had to be put into pot-boiling. The liaison with Murry of course lasted—though uneasily—and they were eventually free to marry in 1918. In the second year of the war there was the death of her brother, which affected her deeply. There were endless moves: even before illness forced her to winter abroad, twenty-two different lodgings in five years are recorded. One of these, in 1916, was the notoriously ill-fated ménage with the Laurences in Cornwall.

It was a restless life partly because the relationship with Murry, we can see, was always ambivalent and unsatisfactory. Alpers is anxious to present a case for the hapless Murry, who publicly beat his breast after Katherine's death, was lambasted by Huxley as the odious Burlap in *Point Counter Point*, and was, according to Alpers, "one of

the most unpopular men to be found in the world of English letters" at the time of the 1953 biography (any book sponsored by him, he says, would have sunk without trace). Reinstating Murry means, to some extent, showing what a mercilessly sharp woman he married; and Alpers does, though with sympathy for all. A good many people recorded being hurt or irritated by the cool, changeable Katherine: "really she is to be avoided," said Russell; her editor Orage wrote to her "You openly and awfully despised human beings and considered them fair game." Lawrence's friends—"Inatsumo reptile", "mud-worm", "spit on her for me", "I hope you will die"—are beyond forgiveness. They were, of course, a pretty spiteful and dishonourable literary crew. But a sketch in Virginia Woolf's diary gives the unmistakable flavour of wifely nastiness:

Murry came in with a pair of blue & pink Dresden candle pieces: "How very nice" she said. "But do fetch the candles." "Virginia, how awful what am I to say? He has spent £5 on them," she said as he left the room. I see that they're often hostile. For one thing—Murry's writing. "Did you like C. & A. [Murry's *Cinnamon* and *Angelical*]? No, I didn't. Neither did I. But I thought D. of an I [his *Dreadful*—wrong—its very difficult, often..."] Then Murry came back. We chatted as usual.

In fact, as Mansfield noted in her journal, she had just the kind of raging temper Lawrence had (Alpers ascribes it to their common illness—But were Clecklow, Keats, and Emily Brontë notorious for ages?). My fits of temper are really terrifying. I had one this morning and tore up a page of the book I was reading. . . . I was a deep earthy colour, with pinched eyes. . . . But what is impressive is her vigorous debate with her own violence in journals: just as Woolf's equally honest record of her mixed love and loathing for her rival Mansfield is.

But Murry was not made of the same stern stuff as the two women. While Mansfield wrestled with her self-dramatizations, Murry needed into his. Certainly Alpers shows him as to be pitied for having an ill and difficult wife; but what use, to a woman with a temperament,

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The busy musical Englishman

By Michael Trend

PERCY M. YOUNG

George Grove
34 App. Macmillan, £12.50.
0 333 19602 3

To have had a father who was described in the following words by Charles Dickens was not a bad start in life:

I have consulted Mr. Groves [sic] of Charing Cross. His suggestive mind gave birth to this remarkable expression—'then why not consider this here breast of woman, off—and let me get another prime 'un in good eatin' order for you, for Sunday week?' What—continued Mr. Groves, 'tis the holds in a day?'

Mr. Groves slapped a piece of venison as he spoke, with the palm of his hand; and plainly signified, by his manner no less than by his words, that this was wisdom.

George Grove did not, however, follow his father into the business of "Fishmonger and Venison Dealer", and although we know him first today as the proprietor and first editor of the musical dictionary which bears his name, his life was one of such extraordinary diversity, industry and activity that a new biography is a welcome event, and especially as this year will see the publication of *The New Grove* (the sixth edition) by Macmillan, Percy Young, best known for his life of Elgar, but also a man of as varied interests as his present subject (he is for example the official historian of Wolverhampton Wanderers Football Club) has approached George Grove with great sympathy. Grove's life is a story which could easily be told without bringing the man alive but Dr. Young, taking the good with the bad and the successful with the slight, has managed to tell it with considerable skill.

Before George's birth in 1820 the Groves had moved to Clapham, the "Jolly Village" and there George received a sound education at Ewells School and then at Charles Pritchard's Clapham Grammar School, both "considered good of their class" as he later wrote. In 1838 Grove became apprenticed to Alexander Gordon, the engraver, and the next few years of his life were taken up in this training. He worked on the Morant Point Light-house in Jamaica and the Gibb's Mill light-house in Bermuda. From light-houses he switched to railways and worked for a while at the Joint Railway Station at Chester, and then on Stephenson's Britannia tubular bridge across the Menai Straits. From railways he turned to the sea, perhaps not such a startling step as it might seem today. Following the advice of Stephen P. Brunel and the architect Sir Charles Barry, Grove put himself forward for the post of Secretary of the Society of Arts in 1850. In 1852 he was appointed secretary to the Crystal Palace Company and in this capacity he became a familiar figure in English life.

His interest in music was growing, and it was now that, along with August Manns the conductor, he began a celebrated series of concerts, and as "G" wrote the programme notes, Grove was also developing his "musical side" and he worked closely with Sir Charles Barry, later Dean of Westminster, on his *Symphony in A*, and on his *Symphony in A*. For some years he helped William South on his *Dictionary of the Bible*, and the end of which time he writes Dr. Young, "it was clear that he had had a lion's share in its realization." Grove himself was thinking of producing a general "Dictionary of Persons" but that idea was left to others to realize. He was also instrumental in helping to set up the Publishing Exploitation Fund with Henry Layard.

His literary activities led him to be appointed editor of *Macmillan's Magazine* in January of 1874. He was also to manage the "literary side" of Macmillan's publishing interests, and in the same month the prospectus for the *Dictionary of Music and Musicians* was issued. The work on this magnificent project took many months and Grove was backed up by a good team yet, in spite of the way things were going, in the August of 1875 Grove

still felt that he was not really in control of his life:

Tomorrow I am 55 years old and what am I? As much a slave as I was at 35, as little near the attainment of any settled position of mind and spirit as I ever was. . . I ought not at my time of life to be a mere shuttlecock at the sport of all the people who employ me or have the least claim on me. I ought somehow to have more weight and leisure—but I can't get it. And yet I feel in myself plenty of capacity.

Henry James, who met him in 1879, wrote that Grove was a very jolly old fellow—one of those London men of letters who have done lots of unrecognized work. (He is sub-editor of Smith's Bible Dictionary and wrote much of it etc.) But this "jolly old fellow" who still felt in him "plenty of capacity" was shortly to begin the final and crowning stage in his career. He was greatly involved with the attempt to found a new college of music in London and he was appointed Director of the Royal College of Music and knighted on its opening in 1883. He wrote to Mary Sullivan, the composer's mother, "I feel my incompetence sadly, and am not able to behave at all like a swell as I suppose I ought to be." However, modest, Grove felt at least that now a "swell" he had risen above the rank of every body's helper and was to move with "all the best men in London". Over the previous years Grove had often worked with, or visited, distinguished men—"It was early in May 1854 when I had to go down to Tennyson's in the Isle of Wight to see the official historian of the opening of the Crystal Palace, to be so to music by Berlioz"—but now at "concerts arranged to promote the College" he found himself beside the Duke of Edinburgh who, in one evening, acted as composer, conductor and violinist. The Royal Family worked hard for the new College. On one occasion the Duke of Albany spoke at length about the superiority of English music. Talking of "Summer is accompaniment" (sic) the Duke said that the word "has hitherto been always taken as the earliest landmark in the history of modern music. We were a century and a half in advance of Planders, Italy, or Germany." (Renewed applause). . . this little glimpse . . . the direct and absolute superiority to the centuries of Handel, the symphonies of Beethoven, the operas of Wagner, is a purely English creation. (Applause). All this, as Dr. Young adds, in a guttural German accent.

Sir George's directorship of the college and his own personal development from this time until his death are much better documented than his earlier years. In an extraordinary series of letters which Grove wrote to one of the College's very first pupils, Edith Oldham, Edith was from a Dublin family, and after her time at the college she returned to Ireland. Grove was a most prolific letter writer (on one short holiday in Switzerland for example, he claimed to have written 193 letters and he asked all his ex-pupils to write to him at least once a year). Edith Oldham, however, was the main object of Grove's epistolary attentions. If these letters had not survived we would know nothing about this very personal side to his life. Sometimes, in reading his letters, one feels a sense of intrusion into a private matter, but the increase in the depth of focus that one thereby obtains is remarkable.

From his public life we are able to get a fairly clear picture of Grove. He was, as Dr. Young points out, a great hand at writing letters to the Times. When one considers his early career it is not perhaps surprising that he felt able to turn to whatever he wished. He was like the great engineers of the Victorian period who knew that all problems should be confronted, that all would be well as long as one got the engineering right, and in some sense, he extended this

attitude to literature. When asked to give away the prizes at a girls' school in Brighton, he told the girls "accuracy is far better than brilliance". Grove was very reliable. "I ought never to write a book without a Grove . . . to correct references and proofs", wrote Stanley. It was felt that he was a master of the "rules of science" and it was assumed that these rules could be brought to bear as well in one field as another.

He was also very inquisitive: on a trip to Germany with Arthur Sullivan in 1867 they engaged in active research into the lives and works of the great composers. They visited Karl Anton Spina, where, according to Sullivan's account, there was a very old clerk v. Doppler who had known Beethoven.

Grove's own musical tastes were very clear-cut. For him the supreme reality of composers was Beethoven, Schubert and Mendelssohn—he wrote the articles on them for the Dictionary. Beethoven

music in this country from the dependent position into which it has been thrown by our extreme devotion to music and policy." Not that Grove in any way despised business—the Royal College itself had been built from the donation of Mr. Samson Fox, owner of the Leeds Forge, and the son of a weaver. This self-made man turned up at the laying of the foundation stone of the new building with his Leeds Forge Brass Band, to show what ensemble playing could be, and why the north was entitled to its say in respect of the nation's music," adds Percy Young.

Grove's own musical tastes were very clear-cut. For him the supreme reality of composers was Beethoven, Schubert and Mendelssohn—he wrote the articles on them for the Dictionary. Beethoven

After dinner, while the company sat in the drawing room with the doors open in the garden and the scent of the flowers, and the moonlight flooding in, Rubinstein played Liszt's arrangement of Schubert's *Erkennung*, "as only Liszt could". After the group, pianist had departed, Grove discovered that there were six broken hummers in the piano.

His taste in literature was similarly conventional. He held Tennyson to be the greatest of poets, and as to novelists he seems, at least as an old man, to have been particularly fond of Turgenev. But it is probably his private life, as revealed through his letters to Edith Oldham, that will create the most interest. They reveal the growing passion that he felt for his young pupil, until he was quite clearly in love with her. His passion certainly cooled in his very last years but for most of his sixties and seventies he was, by letter, the ardent admirer of Edith Oldham. In his public life he was as much of a prude as most of his contemporaries. He was pained at the thought of his own "feminine pupils": "He seems . . . to have actually succeeded in ruling four". Holmes was sent packing. His passion certainly cooled in his very last years but for most of his sixties and seventies he was, by letter, the ardent admirer of Edith Oldham. In his public life he was as much of a prude as most of his contemporaries. He was pained at the thought of his own "feminine pupils": "He seems . . . to have actually succeeded in ruling four". Holmes was sent packing.

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It is to be hoped that in the future Grove's reputation will not become too tarnished by inaccurate second-hand accounts of this relationship. Grove was essentially a generous man, and was interested in the lives of the great composers of both sexes—perhaps in some part to compensate for what he considered to be his own poor health and the sad and early death of his daughters Lucy and Edith. One of the children mentioned that Hippolyte Taine, "in his book on England and English life, he also had a strong sense of humour. As a young man he looked to have been particularly fond of the literary criticism in the *Times*. . . and an endearing custom of writing after Grove's death. Shaw seems to have caught the sides of his character admirably, and how it differs from minutes when ward in as many minutes when Mendelssohn was in the band were a far more than once on his natural conduct, and he was always extremely apologetic, assuring me that he was getting on as fast as he could.

After dinner, while the company sat in the drawing room with the doors open in the garden and the scent of the flowers, and the moonlight flooding in, Rubinstein played Liszt's arrangement of Schubert's *Erkennung*, "as only Liszt could". After the group, pianist had departed, Grove discovered that there were six broken hummers in the piano.

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BERNARD KNOX:
Word and Action
Festschrift on the Ancient Theater
378 pp., Johns Hopkins University Press, £10.
0 8018 2198 3

Bernard Knox is a unique figure in the classical scholarship of America, and indeed in that of the world. Born in Bradford in 1914, he dropped out of St. John's College, Cambridge to fight in the Spanish Civil War as a machine-gunner in the French section of the International Brigade; he owed his survival to a severe wound that removed him from the front battles. Marrying a brilliant American wife, the novelist Bianca Van Orin, he migrated to the United States. During the Second World War his Spanish experience proved valuable when he was dropped behind the German lines to help the French Maquis, and later when he fought in Italy, he emerged from the war with a string of decorations and an enviable command of European languages. Afterwards he took his doctorate at Yale, and taught there for some years before becoming in 1961 the first holder of the chair of Greek literature at the University of Washington. Here young scholars from America and other countries can spend a year on their own work with the use of a good library and in considerable comfort. Knox is the ideal guide for them: a *Festschrift* just published to celebrate his sixtieth birthday is called *Arktouros*, which means "bear-leader". Big and powerful, he has the gentleness of a first-class hotelier, and might have been specially designed for him, the Directorship of the Center for Hellenic Studies in Washington. Here young scholars from America and other countries can spend a year on their own work with the use of a good library and in considerable comfort. Knox is the ideal guide for them: a *Festschrift* just published to celebrate his sixtieth birthday is called *Arktouros*, which means "bear-leader". Big and powerful, he has the gentleness of a first-class hotelier, and might have been specially designed for him, the Directorship of the Center for Hellenic Studies in Washington. 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